

Assembled for Opening of Calder Exhibit



Springfield Union Photo

Among those at the dinner given last night in the Colony Club by the George Walter Vincent Smith Art Gallery and the director, Mrs. Cordelia Sargent Pond, prior to the opening of the exhibition of Alexander Calder's sculpture in the gallery were, left to right: Mrs. Calder; Mrs. Aino Aalto, architect and designer of renown, runner-up to her husband (last on the right) in the competition for the design of Finland's building in the coming New York World's Fair; Mrs. Pond; Miss Katherine Dreier, American painter known for her abstractionist art; Mr. Calder; Prof. Sigfried Giedion, a Swiss, well known for his writing on art subjects; Fernand Leger, who with Picasso promoted cubism and who as a painter has exerted a great influence on present-day art in his native France and in this country; and Alvar Aalto, noted Finnish architect and designer, architect of Finland's building in the Paris World's Fair of 1937 and also of Finland's building in the New York World's Fair of next year, known also for his furniture in laminated wood which was widely acclaimed at the time of its exhibition last winter in New York City. This picture was taken during the cocktail party given for the dinner guests of the gallery and director by Dr. William Barri Kirkham of the City Library Association and Mrs. Kirkham.

LOCAL COLOR By W. G. Rogers

A large percentage of the museum members' groups, hardly able to believe its own eyes, attended the opening last night in the George Walter Vincent Smith Art Gallery of the exhibition of Alexander Calder's mobiles and stabiles, the most extreme modernism ever presented here in a one-man show.

A Service to Springfield

The gallery, under the leadership of Mrs. Cordelia Sargent Pond, the director, does Springfield the great service of staging the most comprehensive showing ever offered of this widely-known sculptor's work. The opening, marked by a reception for Mr. and Mrs. Calder of Roxbury, Conn., and New York City, was attended by leaders in the art world of New York and Paris. The show is now on display to the public, and will continue through Nov. 27.

Mr. Calder, son and grandson of sculptors, is commonly called a sculptor himself, when a baffled and upset public doesn't call him something worse. As a matter of fact, his art is so different from sculpture that a couple of special words, mobile and stable, the former suggested by Marcel Duchamp and the latter by Hans Arp, are required to define it.

Besides the famous mobiles, there

are other items in the show, such as drawings, figures in bent wire, and amusingly contorted wood sculpture. But it is the mobiles, represented in famous private and public collections here and abroad, which are the subject of the most frequent comment. This comment runs from a delirious and enthusiastic praise to indignant condemnation.

Mr. Calder himself has commented on them. He says, according to Mrs. Pond's bulletin, that the mobiles are "plastic forms in motion. Not a simple translatory or rotary motion but several motions of different types, speeds and amplitudes to make a resultant whole."

Calder's "True Approach"

In his foreword to the catalog, James Johnson Sweeney, associate editor of Eugene Jolas' "transition," points out that the present-day machine romanticists have entered upon a sentimentalism which distracts them from the "true approach" (presumably Calder's), to wit: "The machine-concept as a tonic world of flux and neglected organization." And Jean Helion has written of this mobile sculpture that "simple elements revolve at the extremity of supple vectors, and seemingly describe new possibilities of growing and traveling through space."

It is with an introduction of this sort that Mr. Calder's mobiles come to Springfield for the first time. I'm sure it's all very sound and elevating, and, of course, true. We could reply in kind. We could, for example, discuss the question of the durability or continuity of the esthetic impression, and the mystifying requisite, imparted to sculpture for the first time ever by Mr. Calder, of the lapse of time before the total emotional and intellectual conception and impulse are released.

But this sort of treatment seems to me to belong in the shop and studio, rather than in the salesroom. We aren't trying to learn what makes mobiles, but why we like them; we aren't trying to decide what they mean, but how much they mean to us. It is as if the automobile salesman talked about r.p.m., the play of piston shafts, elec-

trical matters, or horsepower in relation to cylinder sizes. That never sold an automobile; indeed it never even gave one away.

Another Sugar Coating

Springfield, which hasn't seen mobiles before, needs another kind of sugar coating. Mr. Calder himself suspects as much, for, again to quote Mrs. Pond quoting him, he has said: "The esthetic value of these objects can't be arrived at by reasoning. Familiarization is necessary."

It's impossible to get familiar with them without going to see them. With them in the museum and us here, we have to tell what they are. These objects, which I enjoy very much and which I should like you to enjoy, are composed of wire, metal plaques, wood, tubing, string, and what not . . . often just what Mr. Calder happens to have handy about the studio. One mobile, for instance, will be a tall trunk of piping, a couple of branches reaching out from it, and 10 or 15 circular, painted metal discs suspended from them . . . a suggestion of a plant form, but only a suggestion. Or, for instance, one will be a large board, and on the surface of it will be pivoted several other objects in the shape of propellers, or interlocking discs, or an exotic leaf, all of them rotating in a plane parallel to the board, or at an angle to it. They are of different colors, and move at different speeds . . . propelled by hand or a wound-up string or electricity . . . and once in a while Mr. Calder slyly attaches to his surfaces an object which is absolutely motionless.

The Two Names Help

Mr. Calder, though he doesn't help us much with his definition, does help with the words mobile and stable. For it is a mistake to go to the show expecting to see sculpture; you are spared that shock by the use of these two names. You are prepared, as much as you ever can be, to see mobiles, something brand-new in Springfield.

They are a new art form. Other men have tried to escape the traditional in sculpture, as modern painters have escaped the traditional in work on canvas. But even the most extreme sculptors, say Gargallo or Zadkine, have failed to negotiate a break as complete as Mr. Calder's. That is not intended to imply that he was seeking a break; that means merely that his search for a form of plastic expression that utilizes both the artistic impulse and his engineering training and which springs from close to the underlying spirit of our age, resulted in this long, and for us sometimes difficult, step. No American has made such a novel contribution to abstract art as this, and Mr. Sweeney writes indeed that he is the only American of his generation recognized as making a "creative contribution to expression in the plastic field."

Likes to See Them Go

Mr. Calder's principal pleasure in his machine-inspired art is the movement. He also likes the occasional collision of metal spangles or wings or multi-shaped areas, with the resulting tinkle, bang or rumble. But to make things go, and to see them go, is almost his whole intention. This interest is as universal as that of the child in toys, or of the adult in any kind of motion. A thing that is static is dead; we have an elemental aversion for what is still and immobile. Our love for what goes is as primitive and deep as the love for nature or the human race, on which traditional artists have constructed their generally accepted works.

Mr. Calder has a right to expect from us an emotional response of the character and the extent of that which is aroused in us by his conservative predecessors. But between us and the response which these mobiles deserve stands an enormous weight of inertia. By virtue of being humans, we cling stubbornly to what is tried, we shy at what is new. I hope sincerely you will not let this innate reluctance to recognize the adventurous in art bother you too much.

Swedish Prints Exhibited In Fine Arts Museum

About 175 prints by contemporary Swedish artists went on exhibition yesterday in the Springfield Museum of Fine Arts. The show, hung in two second-floor galleries and in the corridors, will remain on view to Dec. 4.

The show is Sweden's response to the collection of American prints organized by the Society of American Etchers, sent to Stockholm for exhibit there and now circulating in other Swedish museums.

It is said to be a comprehensive representation of Swedish printmakers. If so, it is suggestive of a country and a life untroubled by most of the disturbance, whether in politics, economics or art, apparent in modern Europe and America. The scenes are placid, like the manner. A variety of mediums is used, and they all add up to a pleasant